

Members of the committee, Chairman Sonju,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

My name is Daniel Viehland and I am the Chairman of Montana Equality Now.

I am here because of family values. Family values like acceptance, respect, and love. These are values deeply rooted in both my own experience and my Christian faith.

As a man with Tourette syndrome, OCD and numerous learning disabilities, I know what it is like to be treated differently because of who I am. I know the damage that can do, how hopeless and angry it can make you feel. But, unlike the LGBT community in Montana, I know that it feels like to have equal protection under the law. That is why I work for equality, to ensure my LGBT friends and neighbors have the same opportunities I have had, and they cannot be fired from their jobs or tossed from their homes for an essential part of their being.

I am also here because I am a Christian. The church I grew up in, Saint Francis United Methodist, was deeply focused on the idea of love. We were taught that everyone is equal in the eyes of God, We were taught not to judge, and we were taught that love is greatest gift that God ever bestowed on humankind. Our church has many LGBT members including lay clergy. These Christians are some of the kindest, most beautiful people I have ever known. Many of them are deeply called by their creator to serve. They are truly children of God.

Anyone who has ever grown up in a church community knows that the term "church family" is no understatement. These wonderful men and women are my family, the people who support each other through baptisms and funerals, through marriages and tragedy. And everyday these people live knowing that, at any moment, they can be evicted from their homes or fired from their jobs because of who God has created them to love. It hurts me, as I'm sure it would hurt any of you, to have my family harmed because of who they are.

The fact is, the discrimination the LGBT community faces falls solidly against the lessons I learned in Sunday school. I was taught that Jesus said the greatest commandment was to love your neighbor.

As a Christian, I refuse to be silent. I refuse to bear false witness. I refuse to deny the basic holiness of my LGBT brothers and sisters. I refuse to deny the beauty of their love and the light in their souls. These people, these incredible people, are my family, and I refuse to believe that God hates my family.

There is nothing godly about discrimination. Discrimination is not human, it is not American, and it is most certainly not Christian.

Discrimination continues to effect the people I love, and I will work for equality as long as it takes. I would encourage the legislators here today to look at our testimony

There are some amazing LGBT people here in Montana. But too many of these wonderful people lack the peace of mind to live openly. When everyone else at work discusses their wives, they are forced to keep silent about their partner of 20 years. When they seek housing, they are forced to list their partner as a roommate. In short they are asked, everyday, to live a lie.

We have asked the federal government and this very legislature to give the LGBT community the freedom to break free from that lie. We have been denied time and time again. So we looked to the form of government closest to us, our city officials, to give the LGBT community that freedom. Missoula stepped up and protected its LGBT citizens.

Now you are being asked to prevent Missoula, or any other city in Montana, from protecting its citizens. You are being asked, even, to disallow Montana cities like Bozeman from stating that they will not fire city employees for who they love. You are being asked to take a step backwards.

I ask this legislature not to take that step backwards, but to step forward, and stand up for equality. Please stand up for my family.

Daniel Viehland

~~Hello,~~

Members of the committee, Chairman.

My Name is Sarah Olafson. I am a student,
a daughter, a granddaughter and a sister. I
walk in fear, for something I can not change
I fear for my civil rights.

I have seen people - people close to me -
attacked, hurt, not treated cruelly. I am human
and I want human rights.

I am your daughters, sisters and granddaughters,
and I want to feel safe in my home.

Sarah Olafson